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ABSTRACT

The complexity, cost, and importance of higher education make some form of central coordinative control in each state a necessity and, for this reason, 43 of the 50 states have already established central boards over their colleges and universities. Some of these boards are control boards to which presidents report and through which institutional budgets are actually determined. These boards do limit institutional autonomy. Still more numerous, but losing in popularity, are the coordinating boards which have some degree of carefully moderated authority over some functions of higher education, but no real control over personnel and budgets, thus limiting the effect on institutional autonomy. In order for central boards to be effective, they must engage in master planning, give attention to the role of institutions, and develop criteria for establishing new ones. It is likely that the coordinating board, despite the fact it is the best arrangement, will give way to the central control board for three basic reasons: (1) the difficulty in recruiting and retaining truly qualified and dedicated lay members on the coordinating board; (2) the problems of keeping the coordinating board divorced from politics; and (3) the unwillingness of university administrators and trustees to accept coordinating board decisions. (AF)

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Group 14
Monday Morning, March 2

ARE STATE SYSTEMS OF PERSUASION, COOPERATION, COORDINATION OR CONTROL HARMONIOUS WITH OR ANTITHETICAL TO INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY?*

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My invitation to appear on this program was based upon two factors, I should think: (1) I have had recent experience as the staff director of a large state board of higher education; and (2) I left that board two years ago to return to direct administrative affiliation with a single state university. Hence, as a drop-out (or escappee, depending on one's point of view) it was thought I might voice an expose of the hidden evils in central boards.

As a matter of fact, I continue to believe in the necessity of central state boards and I support them strongly. The complexity, cost and importance of higher education make some form of central coordinative control in each state an absolute necessity. In my opinion, without such control, much of higher education will become a trackless chaos, composed of fiefs and principalities, each competing viciously with the other for size and variety and novelty of programs. The goals of such competition are political influence, fame, and fortune at the local level, and personal aggrandizement at the leadership echelon.

These matters are understood, of course, by many people inside and outside the educational establishment and they constitute the reasons why 43 of the 50 states have already established central boards over the colleges and universities.

This is not to say that these central boards have been established with ease. The central board represents a change of considerable proportion in the governance of higher education. Historically, American colleges and universities have enjoyed substantial independence from off-campus regulation of any type and there is a natural reluctance among educators for deviation from that principle.

Regardless of difficulty, nonetheless, the 43 boards have been formed--the three most recent being in the states of Louisiana, West Virginia and Washington. The impact of all these boards on our post-high school educational system can and should be wholesome.

The specific question posed to this panel is whether "state systems of persuasion, cooperation, coordination or control are harmonious with or antithetical to institutional autonomy." The answer must be yes and no, I believe. If a board is purely coordinative, then it probably poses no hazard to institutional autonomy as such. On the ohter hand, if the board is one with power to control, it obviously gains that power at institutional expense.

This autonomy over diverse campuses is the important difference between the coordinating board and the control board. A central superboard to which presidents report and through which institutional budgets are actually determined (as in

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Georgia and at least eleven other states) is gaining in favor with many legislators and nonacademic groups primarily because such a board does slice into the muscle of institutional sovereignty. Coordinating boards, on the other hand--these being organizations which have some degree of carefully moderated authority over some functions of higher education but no real control over personnel or budgets--are understandably more acceptable to university presidents, their trustees and sundry allies. These coordinating boards (such as are found in Texas and Tennessee, for examples) are still the most numerous of the two types. But they are slipping fast and the reasons for this slippage and the dangers inherent in it are the burden of the remainder of this paper.

The standard and necessary obligations of effective central boards are obvious. Whether governing or coordinating boards, they must engage in master planning, give attention to the roles of institutions, develop criteria for establishing new schools, and further efficient use of staff and facilities. Then, too, virtually all boards have authority to approve or reject requests for new academic programs, to reduce or end unwarranted duplication of academic effort, to engage in some form of budget review, and to gather and disseminate statistical information and the analysis of such data.

Clearly the exercise of any one of these functions by central boards is to some degree antithetical to institutional autonomy; but under a coordinating board, the total loss of autonomy is measurably less than under a governing board as such.

For this reason I prefer a coordinating board to a governing board and I emphasize the point that there is a vast difference between the two. This difference means, in the case of Texas for example, that the coordinating board exists under state law to carry out legal requirements, to determine basic policy matters and to bring reasonable equity where equity is required in financing program development and the provision of educational services. Each separate college or university, however, has its own board of regents; and so the Texas Coordinating Board is in a position where it can work with these regents and review their recommendations and actions from a perspective of total state need.

Thus, while the Texas Coordinating Board has legal power which puts teeth in its efforts, it is not a board which passes on the employment of teachers of administrators; which selects institutional presidents; which determines how faculty shall be organized; which handles matters of student conduct; or which works out the details of internal budgets.

But while the coordinating board is my preference, I believe it will fail and be replaced by total central control. It will fail, I think, because is has three built-in time bombs which are ticking steadily toward D-Day and H-Hour.

The first of these explosive devices is the difficulty in recruiting and retaining as lay members of the coordinating board sufficient citizens whose interest in, commitment to, and general knowledge of higher education is obvious and deep; who have the patience and verve to shrug off special interest pleadings; and whose moral courage is substantial enough to stand against the heavy pressures brought by persons inside and outside education who see a new or enlarged college either as a personal status symbol or as a state-fed community payroll.

Above all, the coordinating boards simply find it difficult to attract sufficient members with the intuitiveness to recognize for what it is the half-

truth, the glazed over cliché, and the unfounded generalization which support much of the argument for and against the establishment of higher education in every state.

The second time bomb is the fact that coordinating boards are not established so as to place them largely above politics. Admittedly this is no easy task; and perhaps it is an impossible one. Governor John Connally of Texas hoped that he would "build into the coordinating board so much collective political influence that it would be rendered immune to political attack." In Georgia, the decision was to establish the central board through a constitutional provision rather than a statute--thus removing it, hopefully, from the legislative bull ring.

Whatever the method, the board must be placed apart from politics if it is to be effective. For only while statnding apart from the political arena can a board offer its programs and proposals as educational matters, debated and decided on educational merit, and designed to meet the true educational needs of the state. The death-wish of a coordinating board is apparent in its natural temptation to compromise its judgment by second-quessing a legislature rather than pressing for sound programs and deserved levels of support. Through second-guessing, the board hopes to find favor by providing a sort of quasi-professional veneer for decisions which are basically political. But of course, no board can long survive this procedure because it is an exercise in futility.

The third coordinating board destroyer is the unwillingness of university administrators and university trustees to accept coordinating board decisions which would slow institutional growth or deny the initiation of programs or seek some equity in finance for all units of the educational complex. On this point I will say only that each university president and each governing board chairman has a right to expect the coordinating group to hear all sides, evaluate alternatives, and approach problems professionally. But if all board decisions, or any substantial number of them, are to be contested publicly after they are made; if the processes of jungle warefare are to follow each board judgement--then coordination as such must die. Thoughtful legislators and lay citizens, believing as they do that public interest is more than the sum of the interests of separate institutions, will conclude that coordination has failed and will replace it with centralized total control.

Are state systems of persuasion, cooperation, coordination or control harmonious with or antithetical to institutional autonomy? I suggest that they are antithetical--but this does not have to be so. In my opinion, coordination is the answer. The only problem is that effective coordination by its very definition requires uncommonly heavy inputs of maturity in educational philosophy and integrity in educational operations.